**Buildings Committee – AGM Update**

**May 2019**

We last updated in the Pesach edition of Shalom magazine, where we outlined the progress that we had been making in gathering community feedback and in fundraising. We suggested then that as new ideas are assimilated the plans that have been on display in the shul lobby for some time and on the shul website may evolve.

We are now in a position to provide an update on that evolution.

We received a great deal of feedback on the plans published in July 2018. A key theme was flexibility. Enlarging both the Beit Hamidrash and Hall meant reducing the number of separately usable spaces downstairs. Members wondered if this could somehow be addressed? There were many questions on whether more could be done to improve accessibility. The question of upstairs and downstairs seating in the main synagogue has been raised by many. As were many other suggestions and ideas.

One issue of particular significance in the feedback concerned the shul’s relationship with the Yeladenu pre-school. The plans published in July 2018 proposed a new play deck to be installed at first floor level in order to provide the nursery with a dedicated outdoor play space, and to compensate for the proposed loss of play space in the car-park. This is a very expensive component of the plan and concerns have been raised as to the value it adds. Perhaps even more importantly, the nursery school management, with whom we consulted at length, are anxious about the impact that any disruption to the operation of the nursery may have on their competitive position.

With all of this in mind the Building Committee have been busy in the background exploring alternatives. An additional feature underpinning all of this is budget. We are delighted to report that we have now received commitments of £500,000 from within the community. This is a fantastic achievement, and we are grateful to the generosity of those members that have provided financial support. Nevertheless, we remain some way short of our original target of £750,000. We know that there are many more potential donors in the community and believe we can get closer to the target. However, to be prudent, we have taken the view that any alternative plans should be struck at a lower overall cost.

It is important to note that drawing up a new set of plans is not as straightforward an exercise as it may seem. The building committee co-ordinates a team of professionals, consisting of architects, structural engineers, mechanical and electrical engineers and quantity surveyors. All of them are involved in producing a proper plan that can be fully costed and therefore presented and recommended to the community.

We are pleased to say though that we have now arrived at a potential alternative that we feel able to recommend to the community.

**What does this alternative plan entail?**

The alternative plan retains many of the popular features of the original (July 2018) plan. The plan to create a new, enlarged Beit Hamidrash remains unchanged. There is strong appetite in the community to create an additional religious space within the building capable of holding inclusive services and educational events. The alternative plan addresses key issues in the main shul such as ventilation upstairs and lighting. The same applies to the upgrade of the toilet and kitchen facilities, and the general refurbishment of the function hall, the lobby and the youth room on the second floor. All of these proposals remain central to the alternative plan.

So what changes in the alternative plan?

* The alternative plan *does not* consider a significant extension under the undercroft, nor the first-floor play deck. The function hall could not be expanded beyond its current capacity but it would be totally refurbished. The partitioning in the ‘Succah’ area would be modernised and continue to provide flexible/classroom space when needed.
* The modernisation of the function hall would include sliding doors at the back of ‘Succah’ area which could be fully opened up onto the car park. This could allow people to spill outdoors for a summer kiddush; or provide facility to construct a marquee in order to temporarily enlarge the function hall.
* The nursery equipment would be moved to the far side of the car-park to accommodate this. We have confirmed that this change will meet Yeladenu’s overall needs but with less disruption. New storage facilities will also be added, whilst still retaining parking spaces.
* The side entrance would still be upgraded. However, the new security office would be constructed at the front of the building rather than at the back and renewed focus put on upgrading the main front entrance on Tetherdown to be more welcoming and usable. The security fence around the shul building, that CST has recommended is installed, remains part of the alternative plan.
* The important change to link the side entrance to the main areas of the shul and release the function hall from being a corridor is achieved through a clever change in configuration around the kitchen entrance rather than through a dedicated corridor as originally proposed.

Taken together these changes deliver an alternative plan which we believe is equally viable to the version published in July 2018 and in fact has some significant advantages. One major advantage is that we have had confirmation from our professional team that this alternative plan can be delivered for £1.2 million. With the community commitment of £500k and the financial backing of the United Synagogue the plan is therefore virtually funded and can hopefully proceed quickly from this point. Having now spent two years in detailed planning and fundraising mode we feel that this is important.

We appreciate that the community needs time to assimilate this new alternative. In the next couple of weeks we will arrive at a position where full details of the alternative plan can be shared. At that point we look forward to engaging with the community about it, and to working with the new Board to agree our way forward in 2019/20.

Marc Rubinstein and Greg Swimer

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